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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship of psychological masculinity and feminity in children to trait stereotyping and toy preferences. Subjects (157 boys and 157 girls in Grades K-4) were tested on a Child Test Battery, including the Child's Personal Attributes Questionnaire based on the adult PAQ (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974, 1975), the Trait Stereotype measure which parallels the CPAQ, and the Toy Preference test. Results showed highly significant differences between the means for boys and girls on the CPAQ scales. However, within each sex, M and F were essentially orthogonal. Highly significant sex differences were found on the Stereotype measure with each sex showing greater knowledge of same-sex stereotypes. Large sex differences were found in the expected direction in preference for sex-typed toys. However, no consistent relationship between knowledge of trait stereotypes and possession of parallel traits was found. Correlations between the CPAQ scales and the Toy Preference M and F scales were low, and in the predicted direction. These results suggest that in the investigation of psychological masculinity and femininity in children, it is necessary to keep the measurement of traits both conceptually and methodologically distinct from the study of other gender-related phenomena. (Author)

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Psychological Masculinity and Femininity in Children and Its Relationship to Trait Stereotypes and Toy Preferences [1]

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Psychological Masculinity and Femininity in Children and Its Relationship to Trait Stereotypes and Toy Preferences

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Theoretical speculations about the personality differences between the sexes have typically emphasized that males possess instrumental, agentic traits to a greater degree than females and that females posses expressive, communal traits to a greater degree than males. Several objective self-report instruments, such as Bem's Sex Role Inventory (1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire of Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1975) have confirmed these suggestions, males tending to score higher on the Masculinity scales of these instruments (i.e., on agentic items) and low on the Femininity scales (i.e., on communal items). Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, it has been found in adolescent and adult groups, the possession of masculine and feminine traits are not highly and negatively correlated. Rather, they are in each sex essentially orthogonal.

Also in opposition to commonly accepted views, the present investigators (Spence and Helmreich, 1978) have contended that these presonality dimensions of masculinity and femininity are not strongly and simply related to sex-role and other gender-related phenomena. Instead, they tend to be weak and complexly determined. Evidence in support of this proposition is reflected in such findings as the very low correlations between psychological M and F and scores on the Attitude towards Women Scale, sex role items on the CPI Fe Scale, and the tendency to perceive men and women as differing in personality (i.e., degree of stereotyping.)

Such findings have led to an interest in the replicability of the results in young children. In the present paper, we will describe the development of a children's version of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire,

and some of the data collected with this instrument, including its correlation with a measure of trait stereotyping and a rather popular type of measure of sex-role preference in children, namely, a toy preference test.

Before describing the development of a children's PAQ, we will briefly describe the adult PAQ on which it is based. In the short form which we now use exclusively, the M scale consists of 8 bipolar items that are instrumental, or as Bakan (1966) has expressed it, agentic in nature and further, are perceived as being socially desirable to some degree in both sexes (e.g., independent, competitive, decisive). Similarly, the F scale contains 8 items describing expressive, communal (Bakan, 1966) attributes that are socially desirable for both sexes (e.g., gentle, kind, sensitive to others). A third scale, Masculinity-Femininity (M-F) contains 8 bipolar items for which the desirability ratings fall towards opposite poles in men and women (e.g., the ideal woman is seen as somewhat submissive rather than dominant and the ideal man the reverse). The items on this scale are a mixture of instrumental characteristics (agression, dominance) and expressive characteristics reflecting emotional vulnerability (e.g., feelings easily hurt).

In devising the childrens' PAQ to be used with children in kindergarten through the third or fourth grade, we initially attempted to write a series of descriptions of a child, using a simple vocabulary, that were as close as possible to one of the poles of each of the 24 bipolar items on the adult version. Some attributes on the PAQ appeared to have no counterparts in children (e.g., worldly). Accordingly the first trial version of the CPAQ contained 6 rather than 8 item scales for M,F and M-F. The initial instrument has undergone several revisions based on item analyses of results

obtained from pilot groups of children 5-8 years old. The current version consists of 5 items on the M and F scales and 4 items on the M-F scale.

Each item, read aloud to a group of children by the examiner, describes a particular characteristic in a child of unspecified sex; the children are then asked to specify the degree to which they possess the characteristic by checking one of three boxes differing in size (e.g., "Think about a child whose feelings get hurt easily. When someone isn't nice to them, this child feels really bad. Mark how much your feelings get easily hurt.") Each item is scored on a 3-point scale and item scores are summed to obtain total scale scores. Responses to the M and M-F scales are scored in a Masculine direction and responses to the F scale are scored in a feminine direction.

A child PAQ Stereotype measure was also constructed to parallel the Child's PAQ. The Stereotype measure contains a series of items describing a person (rather than a child), the descriptions being the same or slight modifications of those found on the self-report CPAQ. The children are instructed to think of all the boys and grown-up men and all the girls and grown-up women they know and to choose which sex fits the description. Choice is indicated by circling a male or female silhouette. The score for each scale is the number of stereotypes correctly identified.

In addition to these measures, we have developed a Toy Preference Test to tap one aspect of sex role preference in children. The Toy Preference Test consists of a series of colored slides of toys that are stereotypically masculine, stereotypically feminine, or nonsextyped. In pilot work, an attempt was made to match trios of toys in attractiveness and general type (e.g., a feminine Barbie doll, a masculine G.I. Joe doll, and an "Ernie" doll, popular with both sexes). Children are asked to specify

how much they like each toy by chicking a large, medium, or small box. Items are scored on a 3-point scale and item scores are summed to obtain total scale scores.

157 boys and 171 girls in grades K-4 were tested on a Child Test Battery including the Child's PAQ, the Trait Stereotype Measure consisting of items paralleling those on the Child's PAQ, and the Toy Preference Test.

An analysis of the Child PAQ scores revealed highly significant differences ($p < .01$) in the predicted direction between the means for boys and girls on all three scales. As in adolescent and adult groups tested on the adult PAQ, the correlations between the M and F scales were low positive in both sexes. In adults, the M-F scale, scored in a masculine direction, has a significantly positive correlation with M and a significantly negative correlation with F. In children, the correlations of the M and F scales with M-F were low positive or nonsignificant. Except for the M-F scale, the results thus replicate those with adults. The sexes differ in means, but within each sex, M and F are essentially orthogonal.

For the CPAQ Stereotype Measure the mean stereotype score departed markedly from the chance level for both sexes on all three scales. Highly significant sex differences were also found, with boys scoring significantly higher on knowledge stereotypes on the M and M-F scales, while girls scored higher on the F stereotypes. There was no significant sex difference on the total Trait Stereotype score.

Extremely large sex differences ($p < .001$) were found in preference for masculine versus feminine toys. The means for boys and for girls were

in the expected directions and were markedly different from the scale midpoint and on opposite sides of the midpoint for both scales. Girls expressed significantly greater liking for the neutral toys than boys, but for both sexes the mean scores for neutral toys were intermediate to those for the sex-typed and cross-typed toys and close to the scale midpoint.

Although the CPAQ and CPAQ Stereotype data cannot be compared directly, it is possible to infer that stereotypes about sex differences are stronger than self-report differences. The stereotype data for each scale were highly skewed, a number of children making "perfect" scores. The self-report data for each sex were minimally skewed and the means were closer to the scale midpoint than to the minimum or maximum score. When comparisons were made between the CPAQ scores of those who stereotyped perfectly on a given scale and those who made at least one error, no consistant relationship between knowledge of trait stereotypes and possession of parallel traits was found.

When correlations between the CPAQ M,F, and M-F scales and the Toy Preference M and F scales were computed, it was found that the correlations were low and in the predicted direction.

Conclusions

The results of the present study indicate that sex differences in agentic and communal traits can be found as young as kindergarten and early school grades. In addition, Psychological masculinity and femininity are minimally related in children, suggesting that they form a dualism in children, as they do in adults.

The results of the present study have important methodological implications for the study of psychological masculinity and femininity in children. The possession of masculine and feminine traits was minimally related to knowledge of trait stereotypes and weakly related to a commonly used measure of "sex-role" identification--toy preferences. These results suggest that in the investigation of psychological masculinity and femininity in children, it is necessary to keep the measurement of traits both conceptually and methodologically distinct from the study of other gender-related phenomena. Thus, the possession of agentic or communal traits in children does not necessarily imply the existence of parallel stereotypes or sex-role preferences.

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